



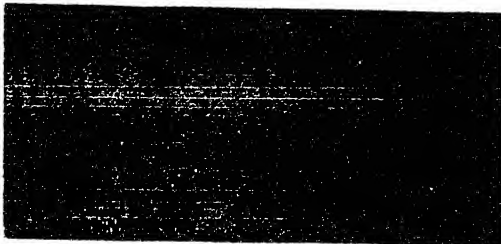
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# Prospects for Closing the Afghan-Pakistani Border (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

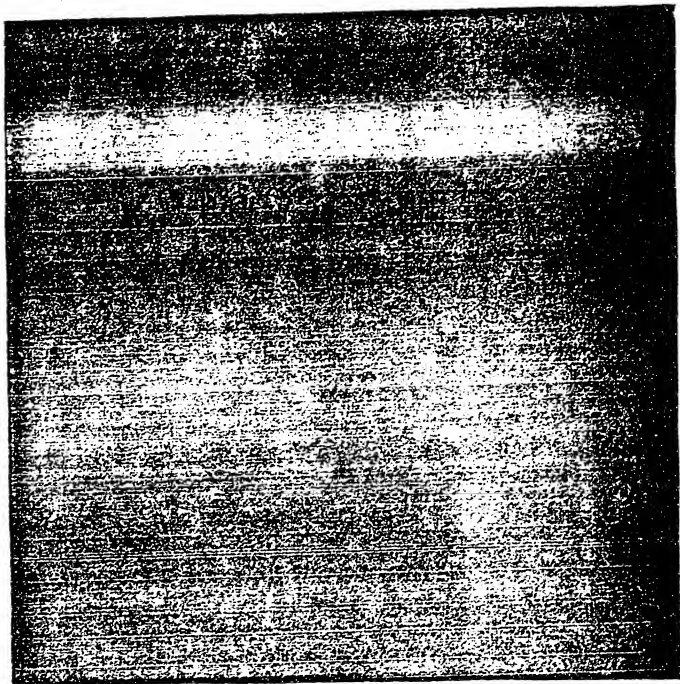
*Information available as of 8 July 1981  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*



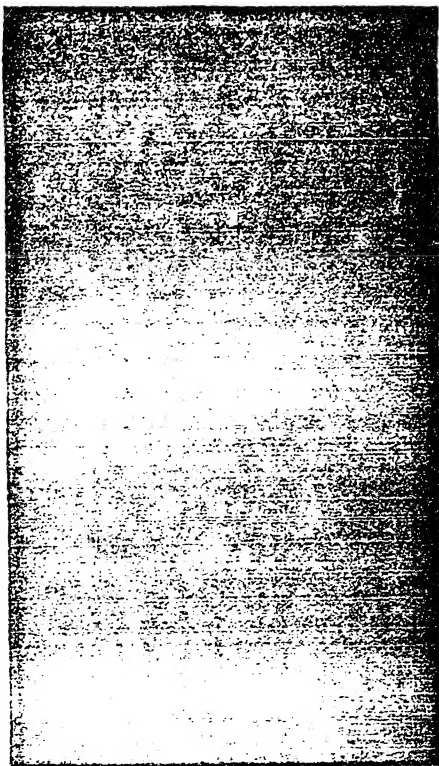
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## Prospects for Closing the Afghan-Pakistani Border (U)



Border Characteristics

The 2,499-kilometer-long border between Afghanistan and Pakistan stretches from very high mountains in the northeast to barren desert plains in the southwest. No

single dominant physical feature is present throughout to clearly delineate the boundary. The alignment is rather a compromise—the result of a late-19th-century agreement negotiated between the British and the Afghans—and reflects the complex historical, cultural, and physical factors of the region.<sup>1</sup> (U)

Historically, the borderlands have been the home territory of fiercely independent and warlike tribes—primarily the Pashtun<sup>2</sup> and Nuristani ethnic groups—whose outlook on life has barely altered through the centuries. Despite numerous invasions through their territories and attempts by conquerors and governments to control the region, most of the tribes have retained a large measure of autonomy. (U)

Culturally, the borderlands are a welter of tribal territories where many clans shift seasonally to graze their animals, to engage in trade and smuggling, to find work, and to visit kin. This fragmented cultural characteristic of the borderlands is further complicated by regular migrations of tribal peoples throughout a still larger region. Some groups regularly leave their summer pastures in the mountains of central Afghanistan in late fall to spend the winter in the warmer valleys and plains of Pakistan. (U)

<sup>1</sup> The boundary, called the Durand Line, is named after Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, representative of the Government of India, who negotiated the agreement on the border in 1893 with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan. By 1896 most of the boundary was surveyed and demarcated; the remainder was finally completed and agreed to by 1921. One exception was the Mohmand tribal territory north of the Khyber Pass and adjacent to the Konar Valley in Afghanistan. This sector of the border was never surveyed or demarcated on the ground, and the boundary runs through the area inhabited by the Mohmand tribal group. Afghanistan does not recognize the Durand Line as an international frontier having specifically rejected the 1893 agreement in 1949. (U)

<sup>2</sup> Pashtun is the official spelling in English used in Afghanistan for this group. They are known also as Pakhtun (Afghanistan), and as Pushtun and Pukhtun in Pakistan depending on differences in tribal dialect. Pathan, a Hindu corruption of the name, was adopted by the British to refer to these hill tribes. See NFAC Research Paper GS 80-10023 (Confidential), March 1980, *Afghanistan: Ethnic Diversity and Dissidence*. (U)

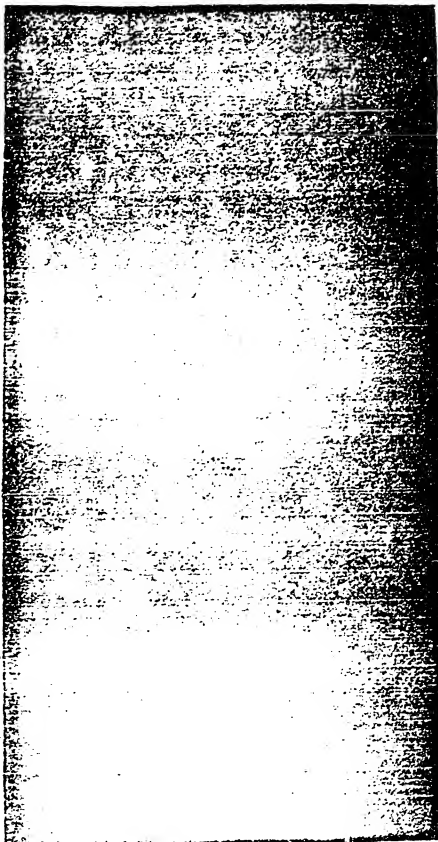
Physically, the borderlands are mostly a jumble of barren and forbidding hills and mountains. Permanent settlements are confined to valleys and basins, where lack of water is a perennial problem. A significant feature of the border area is the extensive drainage systems to the Kabul and Indus Rivers that provide natural routes. These valley routes and numerous up-land paths and trails crisscross the area to such an extent that the frontier has been termed a "sieve." (U)

Although a variety of terrain features typifies the borderlands, certain characteristics are common to major border sectors. North of the Khyber Pass the border generally follows increasingly higher mountain crests toward the Wakhan<sup>1</sup> Corridor where the snowcapped peaks of the Hindu Kush mark the border to China. In this sector are some 120 passes that connect routes leading from Pakistan into the valleys of Nangarhar, Konarha, and Badakhshan Provinces and the District of Wakhan in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> The longer and physically more diverse border sector south of the Khyber contains at least 270 border routes and passes. Here hills and mountain ridges mark parts of the border. In other areas a river forms the boundary and in the far south the border with Baluchistan consists of straight line segments connecting a series of points across largely empty desert country. (U)

Terrain and climatic conditions pose some limitations on use of and accessibility to borderland trails. Winter snows and ice may block passes and trails at the higher elevations; in other areas flooding of streams during spring and early summer restricts or cuts access to cross-border routes at times. In general, however, either alternate routes can be found that are open or, in some cases, snow-blocked trails and paths can be forced by a determined group. Problems of accessibility are encountered most frequently on trails that cross the Safed Koh range west of the Khyber Pass and in the area north of the Khyber toward the Chinese border where the terrain becomes more of an obstacle and routes fewer. The lower and more open and accessible terrain in the south, where the border sections cross desert terrain and ravine-ridden hills, presents

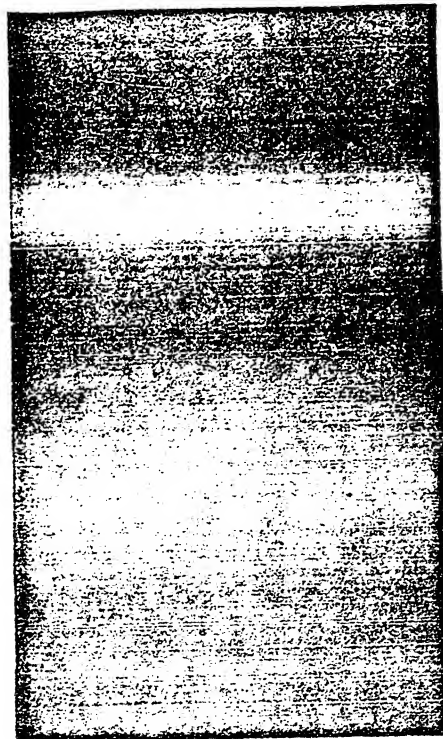
additional control problems because of the far greater number of passes and routes. (U)

### Soviet Efforts To Stop Cross-Border Movement



<sup>1</sup> Wakhan is the spelling approved by the Board of Geographic Names. The more familiar Wakhan is used, however, throughout this paper. (U)

<sup>2</sup> See the map for passes along the Afghan-Pakistan border. (U)



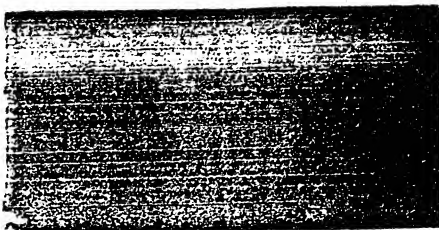
The sparse population generally consists of two groups of Tuzks: the sedentary farmers, who live around Zibak and Eshkashem, and the nomadic herders, who live on the high river plain in Wakhan. The upper part of the Sang Lech Valley, which parallels the border south of Zibak, is uninhabited. (U)

The border trails from Pakistan leading into Badakhshan and Wakhan are inaccessible except by men on foot because most of the passes are impracticable for use by pack animals. Passes are high, averaging 4,500 meters, and are approached by steep trails leading from valley floors some 1,000 meters below. Nearly every pass bordering the Wakhan and Badakhshan areas is covered with glaciers and permanent snow fields which generally limit their use to a few months during the summer and early fall. Conditions vary with individual passes, however, and some can be used with difficulty throughout the year. (U)

Two trails are important old trade routes linking Chitral to Badakhshan via the Baroghil and Dorah Passes. The route through Baroghil Pass descends into the Wakhan Corridor. (U)

All of the trails from Pakistan that cross the border between the Dorah An and the western end of the Wakhan feed into the Sang Lech Valley. The trail network continues into other valleys to the west and southwest and provides a number of routes through Badakhshan to the interior of Afghanistan from the border passes. The Dorah An trail also connects with a southern route to the Konar Valley via the Mandal Pass and the Landy Sind-Katigal Valleys in Konarha Province. Although suitable for pack animals, the route was seldom used in the past because of the hostility of the Nuristanis who frequently used it when making raids into Badakhshan in search of animals and slaves. (U)

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<sup>1</sup> See "FAC Research Paper GC 40-16023" (Secret NF), May 1980, *The Wakhan Corridor: An Unlikely Afghan-China Link*. (U)

States of Dir and Chitral in Pakistan. In general, they are open in summer and into late fall, or until they are closed by heavy snow. (U)

*Nangarhar.* This sector of the border is one of the best known. It contains the area of the Kabul Valley and the Khyber Pass, one of the traditional invasion routes used by conquerors.

*North of the Konar Valley from Barikowt to the Dorah An,* a number of trails cross the border from Chitral and lead directly into the deep, rugged, and heavily forested valleys of Nuristan.\* The trail system in this region is extensive, providing circuitous access to the Konar Valley from the west, and more direct

Passes in the Nuristani sector are similar to those farther north, averaging 4,500 meters in altitude and covered by glaciers and snow fields. They generally are open only in summer to men on foot, but two of the passes—the Brambulu and Paitasun—traditionally have been used in winter by the Nuristanis. South of Nuristan the passes are much lower, averaging less than 2,500 meters, and the number of passes (and trails converging on them) increases substantially. Little is known about the physical conditions of the southern passes, but a considerable amount of trade (smuggling) has flowed through them between Afghanistan and the

\* The nearly autonomous region of Nuristan has neither boundaries nor an administrative center but encompasses the area of four provinces where the Nuristani tribes live. Roughly it includes southern Badakhshan, except for the Munjan and Sang Leon Valleys; Laghman Province north of Mehtar Lam; the west bank tributary valleys of the Konar in Nangarhar and Konarha Provinces; all of Konarha except along the river itself and the area east of the river to the border. The only conquest of the region (then known as Kafirstani) was in 1895-96 by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, who forcibly converted the Kafir tribes to Islam. The Amir immediately withdrew his troops and administrators to the Konar Valley leaving Nuristan in the hands of Pashtun mullahs and existing tribal councils. Since that time, government control has remained more or less confined to the Konar Valley, but even here control tends to peter out near Barikowt. (U)

*South from the border of Konarha Province to the Kabul River,* the border cuts across low, barren, and relatively open hill country. It also bisects the homeland of the Mohmand Pashtun tribe, separating the hill clans from their settled brethren in the Konar Valley and in the area north of the Kabul River as far west as Jalalabad. The Mohmands virtually ignore the border and move freely within their tribal area visiting clan members and carrying out trade. (U)

The Khyber Pass, a 37-kilometer-long defile, lies entirely within Pakistan. The border is at its western end and traffic is controlled by a unit of the Khyber Rifles manned by Afridi Pashtuns. At the border on the Afghan side is the customs house of Tower Khami; on the Pakistani side, the small town of Landi Khana. Just to the east of Landi Khana, the road passes through a belt of dragons teeth (concrete antitank obstacles) constructed during World War II. Beyond the belt the actual pass begins and the road hugs the hills above the narrow pass on its way to Landi Kotal, situated several kilometers farther east. (U)

The extensive drainage systems in both the Afghan and Pakistani portions provide a multiplicity of stream valley and route connections at the border over low passes averaging about 1,000 meters in elevation. A few caravan routes through Pakistan lead toward the Konar Valley and Jalalabad. Most of the routes, however, cross the Kabul\* and, passing through the area below the big bend of the river, enter Afghanistan some 10 kilometers north of the Khyber where the river turns northward and forms a 15-kilometer section of the border. The Mohmands have been the chief transporters of goods on these caravan routes linking Kabul and Peshawar. (U)

*From the Kabul south*, the border is aligned initially along the river and then through ravine-ridden hill country to the Safed Koh range that extends west from the Khyber hills. Three large tribes of Pashtuns live in this area of the border: the Shinwari farmers, who live south of Jalalabad, and, on the Pakistani side of the border, the Orakzai and Afridi tribes, who consider themselves as guardians of the passes. (U)

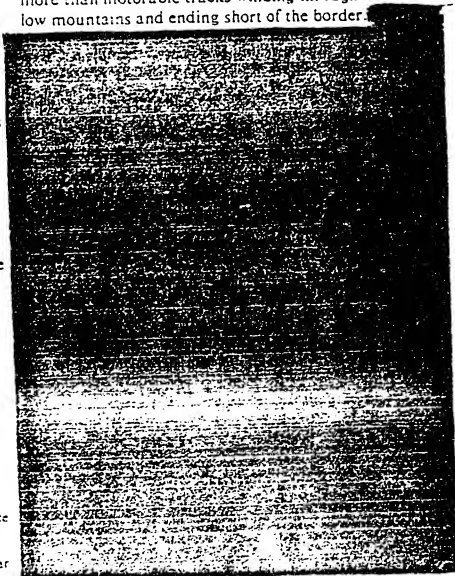
Numerous foot and animal trails wind through the jumbled hills crossing the border through deep ravines or along hill ridges. Some of the trails are alternate routes to the Khyber Pass. Farther south in the hill country are routes that lead from the Bazar and Bara Valleys into Afghanistan. Here the trails turn northward following seasonal stream beds and converge on the south bank of the Kabul. Along the way they link with east-west trails in Afghanistan. These trails make it possible to travel westward through the foothills of the Safed Koh at some distance south of the main Kabul-Jalalabad-Peshawar road. In general, this part of Nangarhar has relatively milder winters than farther north. Passes are open most of the year, though winter and spring rains may create occasional flash flooding and treacherous conditions. (U)

*South of the hill country*, the border turns westward and follows the east-west aligned Safed Koh range. Here some peaks reach 4,600 meters in elevation and

\* The Kabul is not navigable by a boat of any size until its confluence with the Konar near Jalalabad. From there rafts can be used, primarily as ferries, but the river generally is not safe because of rapids. Navigation does not begin until the river enters the Peshawar plain near Michni Fort in Pakistan. (U)

the terrain is rugged. The 20 main border passes through the Safed Koh average 3,400 meters in elevation and are more hazardous. The majority of the border routes are pack trails used primarily by some of the Afridi clans to transport salt from Pakistan into Afghanistan on the backs of small, sturdy bullocks. Because the south face of the mountain range receives a considerable amount of both rain and snow, passes and trails through the Safed Koh often are blocked, usually from January through June. (U)

*Paktia-Paktika-Zabol-Qandahar*. In this sector, the Kabul-Qandahar highway parallels the border at distances of approximately 100 to 150 kilometers. Except for the Qandahar-Spin Buldak-Chaman road in the south, which leads to Quetta in Pakistan, access from the Kabul-Qandahar road to the border is over a sparse network of gravel roads. Most of the roads are little more than motorable tracks winding through a belt of low mountains and ending short of the border.



with an extensive trail maze in the low mountains of Paktia Province. To the south are about an equal number of trails suitable for animals and for men on foot that can be used to cross the border through the labyrinth of paths in the Waziristan hills and the Tobar Kakar Range. (U)

Among these trails are a few main routes used primarily by nomads<sup>10</sup> who annually trek to and from Afghanistan. In practice the term nomad includes those shepherds, camelmen, traders, and laborers who seasonally move their families and animals into Pakistan and do a little moneylending and smuggling on the side. The term is also applied to those laborers, traders, moneylenders, and thieves who leave their families at home and wander into Pakistan alone or in small groups. The latter types of "nomad" usually move on foot and are free to use any of the many paths and trails that cross the border. In contrast, the large groups of nomads traveling with women, children, and animals have a more restricted choice. The individual route chosen is determined by the proximity to the tribal territory occupied in Afghanistan, local security considerations, and the availability of grazing and water along the route—conditions which vary from year to year. (U)

*South of the Safed Koh*, the border follows along the crests of a series of low mountains and hill ranges. Unlike most other border sectors, Paktia and parts of Paktika are fairly heavily wooded. Between the Kurram River and Chaman, the border cuts across a tangled highland area—the Waziristan hills and the Toba Kakar Range—that consists of basins, ridges, and ravines. High-walled ravines, from 90 to 900 meters in width, are interconnected to one another and to the basins by narrower gullies created by heavy summer rains. The eroded landscape is a maze of passes and trails, many of which are suitable for pack animals; many others are only wide enough for a man on foot. (U)

The trail network follows the extensive drainage system of the area, with trails crossing the border over water divides, in streambeds and ravines, and along hill ridges. Although this section of the border is generally drier than areas farther north, snow melt and spring rains (March-April) or the occasional violent summer storms turn the streambeds into destructive walls of water temporarily blocking or limiting access in the borderlands. In winter, snow falls at the higher elevations and below-freezing temperatures occur from December to March. Brief snowstorms can occur as far south as Chaman until late March. Strong northwesterly winds—scorching hot in summer or bitterly cold in winter—sweep across the border region most of the time. (U)

Between the Safed Koh range and the village of Khariachi, where a main caravan trail crosses the border in the Kurram Valley, a motorable track links Gardez (Afghanistan) with a road to Parachinar (Pakistan) via the Peywan Kandaw (Pewan Kotel, or Peiwan Pass). From Khariachi south to Waziristan, innumerable trails lead from the Kurram Valley and connect

The major nomad routes are the Khyber Pass and adjacent trails, the valleys of the Kurram, Kaitu, Tochi, Gumal, Kundar, and the Pishin Lora Rivers and their tributary valleys, and the border-crossing point at Chaman. The normal period of nomadic movement into Pakistan is from mid-October through mid-December, with a return to Afghanistan during April and May. The period of travel varies depending on the weather and the economic and political conditions in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (U)

<sup>10</sup> Nomads are called *kuchi* in northern and eastern Afghanistan and in Peshawar, Bannu, and Kohat in Pakistan; in southern Afghanistan and in Dera Ismail Khan and Baluchistan in Pakistan, they are known as *powindah*. Nomads are primarily Pashtun tribes as are most of the people who live in this part of the border. See NFAC Research Paper GC 79-10105 (Confidential), October 1979, *The Pashtuns of the Afghan-Pakistani Borderlands*. (U)



*Qandahar-Helmand-Nimruz.* Except for the Pishin Lora Valley, this sector of the border is not crossed with nearly the same frequency as the others. Partly for this reason, combined with the remoteness of the area, Soviet activity has been minimal. The border extends westward through an uninhabited desert region where a few old trade routes cross from Afghanistan into Baluchistan. The alignment of trails is necessarily determined by the location of wells. Because the water supply is ephemeral, the routes are only generally defined and can vary from season to season or year to year. (C)

#### Outlook

